

# Comparative Analysis of University English Teaching between China and the United States from the Perspective of Constructivism

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**Abstract:** Constructivist learning theory is a kind of learning philosophy and an important field of educational research. Its unique view of knowledge, learning, students and teaching has an important reference significance to our teaching practice. In order to understand the impact of constructivist learning theory on English teaching in China and the United States. This paper compares and analyzes English teaching in China and the United States. The results show that there are differences between English teaching in China and the United States from the perspective of constructivism. Chinese teachers are generally influenced by traditional concepts and cultures, and teaching methods are limited. Although the role of teachers in China is gradually shifting to mentors, friends, and facilitators, it is still immature, and needs to be developed. American universities pay more attention to the use of constructivism in teaching. The results show that the constructivism teaching has a positive significance in English teaching, which can promote students' self-learning and self-construction of knowledge, thus cultivate students' innovative thinking and critical thinking.

## 1. Introduction

Constructivist teaching theory is an important branch of cognitive learning theory. It was first proposed by the famous Swiss psychologist Piaget in the 1960s, and later developed by Vygotsky, Ausubel, Bruner and many other psychologists. With the continuous efforts of educators, this theory has been enriched, developed and gradually formed a relatively complete system. Constructivism believes that learning is a dynamic process of dynamic construction. It is the process of the learner himself consciously and actively constructing the meaning of knowledge in the form of collaborative conversation with the help of teachers and other learning partners.[1] At the same time, learning the cognitive structure of the person is also reconstructed.

In the 1990s, constructivism began to appear in the Western education sector. Since the beginning of the 21st century, it has been widely accepted by China and introduced into foreign language teaching researches. There are only 503 foreign language teaching research papers based on constructivist theory found in Chinese journals. Only two of them are at the end of the last century, and the rest are in this century.[2]

Under the guidance of constructivist learning theory, this paper makes a comparative analysis of English teaching in China and the United States, trying to solve the following problems, namely, how the degree of constructivist teaching theory is applied in Chinese and American English classes; Contrastive analysis of constructivist teaching theory in Chinese and American English classes and the reasons for the differences; Through the comparative study of the classes in the two countries, how to further promote the active application of constructivist learning theory in English teaching in China.[3] This paper intends to analyze and explore these issues, and hopes to promote the improvement of English teaching in China.

## 2. Overview of English Teaching Researches in China from the Perspective of Constructivism

Although constructivism was introduced late, it showed a strong vitality as soon as it appeared. It has exerted all-round influence on the study of foreign language teaching. It provided us with a new perspective to examine foreign language teaching, which triggered the concept and teaching mode

of foreign language teaching, such as changes in teaching conditions, teacher training, etc.[4] Firstly, the empirical and non-positive categories are distinguished based on whether some relevant teaching experiments, questionnaires or case studies concluded under the guidance of constructivist theory.

We also classify the areas and contents of the sample research. It is mainly divided into two categories: 1) Macro-research on constructivist theory and model in foreign language teaching; 2) Micro-study on constructivism and English teaching practice. See Figure 1:

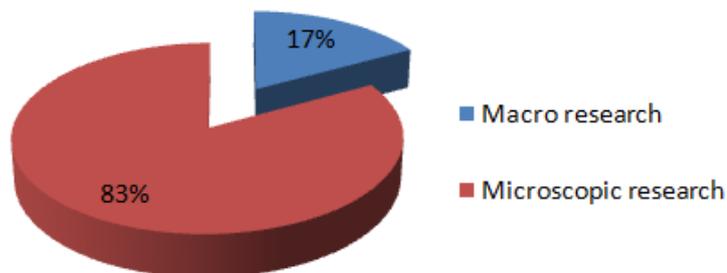


Figure.1 Research classification

The first category of "major researches on constructivist theory and model in foreign language teaching" mainly includes two aspects: 1) the guiding significance of constructivism in foreign language teaching; 2) using constructivism to construct a new teaching model. There is a significant difference in these two studies, as it shown in Figure 2:

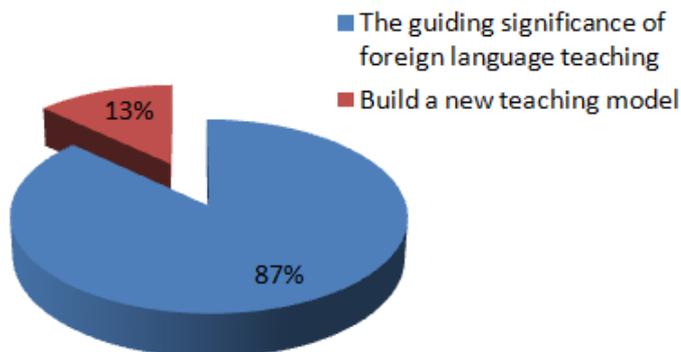


Figure.2 A Macroscopic Study of Constructivism Theory and Model in English Teaching

### 3. Two different tendencies in English Teaching in China and English teaching in United States

#### 3.1 Differences in student requirements

(1) Emphasis on the cultivation of students' innovative ability. The most striking feature of methods of English teaching in the United States is the emphasis on teaching students to think independently and to develop students' intellectual and innovative abilities. The teaching methods in the United States are different from those adopted in many countries, not only because American classroom teaching is not a common teacher teaching on the podium, but students are listening to and recording the formal or informal traditional process, and because of the whole process of teaching and learning. The process does not place great emphasis on students' learning and accumulation of knowledge. Students spend a lot of time learning to how to use reference materials and statistics from libraries and computers. The idea behind the American teaching method is that if teaches teach students about reasoning and hands-on researches, and students will seek any knowledge they need at any time in their lives. Therefore, knowing how to solve problems is more important than accumulating knowledge.

(2) Emphasize the accumulation of knowledge. At present, China's education sector is vigorously promoting quality-oriented education and learning from some advanced educational concepts. However, teaching in large and medium schools is still prevalent in class activities that teach

knowledge. There are two main factors that make up this tendency:

First, traditional teaching concepts still have a great influence on China's modern teaching style.

Second, test scores have the power to determine the quality of the teachers' teaching and determine scores of the students.

### 3.2. Differences in teaching style

(1) Emphasis on students' participation in American classrooms. In many courses in the United States, teachers not only are responsible for teaching but also require students to participate in classroom activities. In the university, some professors even take into consideration the performance of students' participating in classes activities in the final review. At the university level, students' "hands-on" and participation are well emphasized. The interaction and feedback between teachers and students are the main line of class teaching activities.

(2) Formal lectures are still prevalent in Chinese classrooms. The teaching style of many courses is still characterized by formal lectures. The participation of students and the interaction between teachers and students have not received the attention of teachers. This classroom teaching process encourages students to be mentally lazy because they are not accustomed to independent thinking and neglecting the acquisition of innovative abilities. Therefore, although Chinese students have been studying for 8 years, most of them are still not able to master English language skills and communication skills.

For the convenience of research, we have roughly divided this part of the samples, which is divided into seven categories. In fact, no articles can be 100% separate into a smaller field, but to some extent span several areas. In order to facilitate the operation, we will use the main purpose of sample research as the standard. Figure 3:

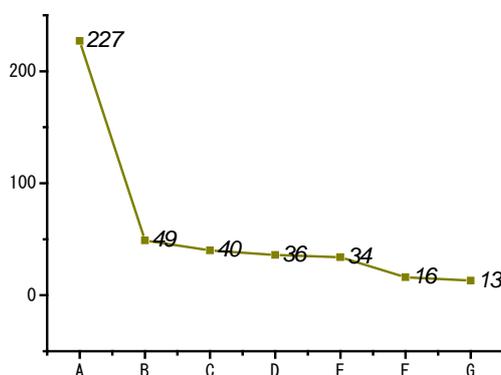


Figure.3 Micro-study Classification of Constructivism and English Teaching Practice

From the above figure, we can clearly see that the research field is mainly focused on multimedia and network teaching. Although the research in other fields is relatively scarce, we find construction in both absolute and smaller areas. The combination of doctrine and foreign language teaching research has taken place in various levels and fields.

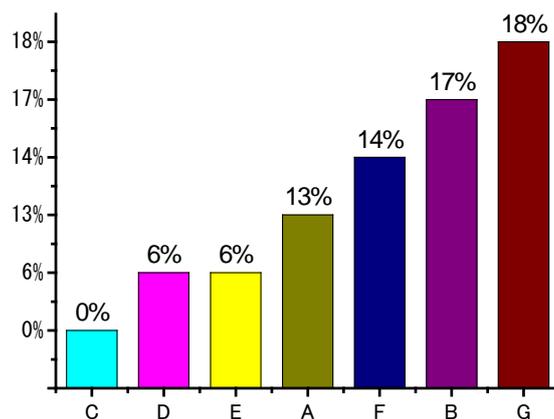


Figure.4 The core journals of constructivism and English teaching practice

As shown in Figure 4, in the largest number of multimedia and online teaching articles, the percentage of articles published in core journals is not the highest. Although we cannot generalize the core journals with a high level, we can still see some problems from the above data. An increase in the absolute number does not mean an increase in the quality of the article, or in some sense, it is more a low-level repetitive labor.

#### 4. Conclusion

Constructivism has shown a great vitality in the study of foreign language teaching. Chinese scholars have carried out all-round and multi-angle explorations on the road of introducing theory and integrating it with practice, and accumulated considerable experience. We have found that the thinking of foreign language teaching research has been further expanded, and we are actively acquiring valuable theories and ideas from more interdisciplinary researches, making my foreign language teaching researches more rational and broader. From the perspective of constructivism, the analysis of two main different tendencies in the teaching methods in China and the United States enables us to learn from the modern concepts and methods that we can use to maintain the quality of Chinese education and teaching.

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